

Friendship Heights TMD Advisory Committee Meeting

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Summary – Meeting of May 12, 2009

Voting Members Present

April Birnbaum	Lerch, Early and Brewer, Representing New England Development
Leonard Grant	Friendship Heights Village Council
Mary Herman	Polinger Shannon and Luchs (Employer of greater than 50)
Gregory Knoop	Oudens Knoop Knoop + Sachs Architects (Employer of fewer than 50)
Bill McCloskey	Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights
Robert Schwarzbart (Chair)	Friendship Heights Village Council
R. Mallory Starr (Vice Chair)	Somerset House Management Association

Non-Voting Members Present

Sandra L. Brecher	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
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TMD Staff Present

Jim Carlson	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
Nakengi Byrd	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services

Absent

William P. Farley	Town of Somerset
David Glass	Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers
Chief Roy Gordon	Chevy Chase Village Police
Capt. Russell Hamill	Montgomery County Police
Jessica Moore	The JBG Companies
Carlean Russell	Saks Fifth Avenue (Employer of greater than 50)
David Viertels	EagleBank (Employer of fewer than 50)
Kenneth Williams	GEICO

Guests

Delegate William Bronrott	District 16 Delegate
Tiffany Gee	Chevy Chase Land Company
Ken Hartman	BCC Regional Services Center
Bob Joiner	The Agenda News
Julian Mansfield	Village of Friendship Heights
Leonard Mudd	Friendship Heights Village Council
Barbara Tauben	Friendship Heights Village Civic Assn.
Maurice Trebach	Friendship Heights Village Council

Items 1,2,3 – Introductions, Review Approval of the May minutes, Chair’s Comments. Members and guests introduced themselves. The May minutes were approved and seconded as written.

Chair Robert Schwarzbart announced that the WMATA representative **Jackie Smith**, Acting Superintendent of the Western Division, and **Stephen Petruccelli**, recently retired WMATA Superintendent of Bus Operations, were unable to attend the meeting owing to a last minute schedule change. They will be rescheduled for the June meeting.

Mr. Schwarzbart introduced two colleagues on the Friendship Heights Village Council: **Maurice Trebach** - Chair; and **Leonard Mudd** - Vice Chair. Mr. Mudd has overseen the recent improvements in the Village, including the repaving project, which is nearing completion.

Mr. Schwarzbart introduced **Julian Mansfield**, Friendship Heights Village Manager, to provide updates on Village projects. Mr. Mansfield announced that CVS will be coming to Chevy Chase Pavilion; there is a building permit sign in place at the former Talbot's. Courtyard by Marriott, the former Holiday Inn is close to completion and should be open in September. The Village re-paving project is also nearly complete and should be completed in 2-3 weeks.

Mr. Schwarzbart introduced **Delegate William A. Bronrott**, who serves in the Maryland House of Delegates, representing District 16 in Montgomery County since January 1999. Delegate Bronrott currently serves on the Appropriations Committee; Chairs the House Special Committee on Drug and Alcohol Abuse; House Special Committee on Administrative, Executive and Legislative Review; and Vice Chair, Joint Audit Committee.

Mr. Bronrott is also a member of the Joint Committee on Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC); Chairs the Land Use and Transportation Committee, Montgomery County Delegation; and Chaired the Transportation Committee from 2003-2007. He is a member of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board and Vice Chair of the Montgomery County Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee.

Mr. Bronrott has been recognized by various societies and organizations committed to reducing drunk driving and alcohol abuse, and for his humanitarian activities. The American Automobile Association named Mr. Bronrott *Maryland Legislator of the Year* in 2002. The National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running recognized him with its *Leadership Award* in 2003. In 2007 the Village of Friendship Heights presented **Mr. Bronrott** with the *Elizabeth Scull Outstanding Community Service Award* in 2007.

Before joining the State Legislature, **Mr. Bronrott** was Press Secretary to U.S. Representative Michael Barnes, 8th Congressional District, Maryland. He has two degrees in Communication from the University of Maryland and is President of Bronrott Communications, a public relations consulting firm.

Mr. Bronrott's efforts to promote vehicular and pedestrian safety and to improve transportation have well served Montgomery County and Maryland.

Mr. Schwarzbart asked the committee to welcome **Mr. Bronrott**.

Item 4 – Discussion / Q&A with Delegate Bronrott: **Mr. Bronrott** said the budget was a challenge during the recently completed legislative session, but that most important priorities would continue to receive funding. He has been on the Appropriations Committee for the last three years and the Sub-Committee on Transportation and the Environment. **Mr. Bronrott** stated he was glad to be in attendance and believed in the mission of the Advisory Committee.

Mr. Bronrott said he ran for office as an advocate of health and safety issues, with an emphasis on transportation and smart growth policy. Among his first actions taken in office was to focus on pedestrian safety, adding to a safety-oriented portfolio he had worked on previously. Thirty years earlier he worked with two mothers, one from Maryland and one from the west coast, to help launch Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and has worked to get drunk driving laws passed here and nationally, along with seat belt laws, child passenger safety laws and truck safety laws.

Mr. Bronrott started to focus more on pedestrian safety about 10 years ago because it did not seem to be getting the attention it deserved. He continues to promote to communities that ‘crossing the street should not be a death-defying act.’ In 1999 **Mr. Bronrott** met with **Gail Nachman**, former Director of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Regional Services Center, to take steps in the Bethesda and Friendship Heights communities to make them more pedestrian friendly. He brought together members of the community, police, civic organizations and local government leaders to form the *Greater Bethesda-Chevy Chase Pedestrian Safety Coalition*. Its purpose was to focus on education, enforcement and engineering; the group produced the campaign “Drive With Care, Walk With Caution.”

People understood the need for safety in driving and walking, but the campaign also had an important health component because it encouraged walking. The campaign reflected **Mr. Bronrott’s** values and the kind of community he wanted to promote in District 16. He had grown up in Montgomery County and had seen the sprawl and how it had become very car-oriented.

In 2000 **Mr. Bronrott** worked with then **County Executive Doug Duncan** to correct the infrastructure in order to make it truly pedestrian friendly. There was a need for a county wide approach. **Mr. Bronrott** was appointed to the *Blue Ribbon Panel on Pedestrian and Traffic Safety*, which spent about 18 months looking at enforcement, education and engineering aspects of pedestrian safety. **Mr. Bronrott** added a fourth ‘E’ for enactment of laws. The group looked at innovative pedestrian safety practices around the region and the country and saw how communities can be transformed if there is a focus and the necessary resources are committed to pedestrian friendly environments. Communities that make the needed investment in walking and pedestrian safety enhance the environment and the economies of those areas.

The panel produced a report in 2002 for the Executive and the County Council outlining its recommendations. **Mr. Bronrott** noted that yesterday the mayor of the District of Columbia had just come out with a blue print for how to make Washington DC more pedestrian friendly. Much of what the DC document contains is already in the earlier document the Blue Ribbon Panel produced. **Mr. Bronrott** encouraged the group to access the report, which is still on the Department of Transportation web site. **County Executive Isiah Leggett** has embraced the recommendation of the report and has continued to promote the county’s Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee and its work implementing the 50 plus recommendations.

Mallory Starr commented that he liked the ‘three E’ approach to pedestrian safety, which gives it focus. **Mr. Bronrott** added that the fourth E, enactment of laws, is also important since there are many loopholes that undermine safety. Much of the engineering focus has been on maintaining the flow of traffic. There are now laws that penalize drivers that fail to stop for pedestrians at crosswalks and increasing the penalties for drivers that do not stop for school buses. It used to be a misdemeanor to hit and run, sometimes causing death or serious injury - now it is a felony.

Leonard Grant asked if there was any specific place in the county where the Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendations had been implemented. **Mr. Bronrott** said the county is now doing a better job of tracking pedestrian collisions, focusing on 'hot spots' that need improvement. In Friendship Heights and other communities, there is an effort now through engineering to add traffic calming measures to channel both vehicles and pedestrians in a way that is safer. Measures such as bulb-outs at crosswalks, putting in more crosswalks, installing countdown signals and creating more midblock crosswalks creates a more pedestrian friendly environment. Engineers at first were reluctant to install countdown timers, but have come around and see the benefit. Now, whenever a new development goes in or a signal has to be changed, it will be a countdown signal.

Mr. Schwarzbart said he and **Julian Mansfield** had the idea to place Yield to Pedestrian signs in the intersections along Willard Avenue, which tends to promote higher speed for vehicles. The county did a series of studies and concluded that the signs should not be placed in the intersections; the signs instead were placed in other areas of the roadway. **Mr. Schwarzbart** witnessed a near pedestrian collision at an intersection near his home, illustrating the need for better signs at the intersection and also the need to overcome bureaucratic resistance to ideas for improvement. **Mr. Bronrott** said he was familiar with the situation and had discussed the issue with the Village Council and the manager. Unfortunately, nothing had come of it and the sign is still in the middle of the block.

Bill McCloskey said that there seemed to be very little enforcement of pedestrian safety and traffic movement in general. He was told by the police there are two cruisers between Friendship Heights and Potomac at any given hour. Anything **Mr. Bronrott** can do to increase the police budget would be welcome.

Mr. McCloskey added that he understood the need for gang enforcement and other activities, but having such a low police presence in the area is ineffective. **Mr. Bronrott** said each district should be looked at in terms of where the priority resources should go – if traffic safety is a higher priority in this district, then that is where the resources should be focused. **Mr. Bronrott** added that police budgets in area jurisdictions were facing steep budget cuts during this legislative session, but many of those cuts had been avoided. **Mr. Bronrott** said he believed traffic enforcement to be a high priority in District 2 and he would make the case on behalf of Friendship Heights and Bethesda.

Sandra Brecher stated that a recommendation for extending crossing times at signals from an earlier standard that allowed a pedestrian four feet per second to 3.5 feet per second was being implemented at all signals in the county. This is especially important in Friendship Heights, which has a higher concentration of mobility-impaired pedestrians. This is due to the presence of an older population plus the large number of medical offices.

In connection with this, the crossing at Willard Avenue and Wisconsin has been a frequent topic of the committee. Drivers turning left off of Willard to travel north on Wisconsin come very close at times to hitting pedestrians trying to cross Wisconsin. The question came up: Why couldn't cameras be used as an enforcement tool? There are speed cameras and red light cameras, but there is no existing state law that allows the county to use cameras for pedestrian safety enforcement. **Mr. Bronrott** agreed that it would probably require state legislation to allow counties to affect this kind of change in enforcement.

Mr. Starr added that the cameras could be used for study and education, rather than strictly for enforcement. **Mr. Bronrott** said a preliminary step would be to study whether or not the present technology would even allow a camera to be used for something other than speed or red light running.

Ms. Brecher said she thought that speed or motion is the triggering mechanism for the current camera system. She is not sure what would be the trigger for pedestrian crosswalk violations.

Ken Hartman added that **Emil Wolanin** in the county's traffic engineering office may know if the technology is available, since his office uses the current speed camera systems.

Mr. Starr said that he believed the technology is available, but also just the presence of cameras has been shown to change behavior.

Mr. Hartman noted that over the last 10 years he has seen significant changes in Bethesda and Friendship Heights, from planning to traffic engineering; changes like crosswalk bump outs and countdown timers have really improved things on the street. **Mr. Hartman** will follow up with Capt. Russ Hamill, Second District Commander, to see if he can get more of a traffic enforcement presence in Friendship Heights [addressing **Mr. McCloskey's** earlier comment].

Mr. Hartman said DOT Traffic Division recently conducted three pedestrian studies. These were very intensive studies, working with a consultant to walk the area over a two day period and identify everything possible that affects pedestrian safety. The recommendations that came out of these studies are very comprehensive. The State Highway Administration is currently reviewing the results of a Wisconsin Avenue study, which is the stretch from Montgomery Avenue down to Leland and Woodmont. There are a host of recommendations that will improve pedestrian safety. There will be a third study on Rockville Pike, just north of Montrose Rd., where there have been a number of pedestrian collisions, some involving senior citizens.

Mr. Hartman asked **Mr. Bronrott** if he saw the need to return to more intensive local dialogue vs. the more general county wide focus. Has something been lost in the Bethesda-Friendship Heights community by expanding the focus of pedestrian safety efforts to the county as a whole? **Mr. Bronrott** said that **Mr. Hartman**, the TMD Advisory Committee and other community groups are in a better position to answer that question. It does make sense especially for the central business districts, like Bethesda, Friendship Heights and Silver Spring, to be active in dealing with these issues, and getting everyone involved, from police to community associations to private citizens.

Mr. Bronrott added that Montgomery County participates in a region wide public relations campaign a couple times a year through the Washington Council of Governments (COG). He and **Mr. Duncan** met with COG after the Blue Ribbon report was issued to say that these issues are not only a Montgomery County problem – the Washington Metro region should also be involved in pedestrian safety efforts. As a result, COG has for the last several years organized a region wide pedestrian safety campaign (the Street Smart Campaign). What makes regional campaigns most effective is the active participation of the local jurisdictions in getting the word out and distributing the promotional and information materials at the grass roots level. **Jeff Dunkel**, Montgomery County DOT, is the point person for the county's pedestrian safety efforts; he has materials available.

Barbara Tauben said that, in regards to decreasing the walking rate at signals from four feet to 3.5 feet per second, the County Council had voted to defer funding for that measure. **Ms. Tauben** added that she believed **Mr. Bronrott** was instrumental in passing a law concerning cell phone texting while driving. **Mr. Bronrott** said he was not a sponsor on that legislation, although he was involved in putting forward a proposal to require hands free operation of cell phones. **Ms. Tauben** pointed out that the law makes sending text a violation, but not reading text. **Mr. Bronrott** said the law enforcement community would have a much harder time enforcing the reading of text than sending it.

Mr. Schwarzbart said he was concerned about the use of cell phones generally, and that using a cell phone leads to insufficient attention to the road. Driving while on a cell phone is indistinguishable from driving drunk at times. **Mr. Bronrott** said he did not believe the state would ever ban cell phone use in cars. An earlier effort by **Mr. Bronrott** to ban cell phones did not receive support from other lawmakers; therefore a hands-free law is probably the best that can be achieved.

Mr. Hartman, in response to **April Birnbaum's** observation of pedestrian-vehicular collisions on Old Georgetown Road near Woodmont, said that many people were crossing at the midblock. DOT installed stop signs on Edgemoor Lane near the Metro in order to slow traffic and provide a safer crossing environment. People tend to cross that section of Old Georgetown at all times, regardless of what cycle the traffic signal is on. **Mr. Bronrott** said psychology plays a part in pedestrian safety – creating the impression that police will be out there enforcing pedestrian rules and broadcasting an educational message to whatever medium people use will have an influence. It is important to have the messages of education and enforcement together; one without the other is a waste.

Mr. Bronrott added that his earlier work on pedestrian safety found that people out in the neighborhood, holding signs to 'slow down' and just being a visible presence sent a powerful message to drivers and pedestrians. He would like to see something similar take root in the business community, with business people getting more directly involved in pedestrian safety efforts.

Mr. Schwarzbart asked how the present budget difficulties will impact the county's pedestrian safety programs. The committee had for some time been attempting to get an increased police presence in Friendship Heights, especially needed in light of the increased development, which brings in more traffic. **Mr. Bronrott** said the Council approved \$4 million in FY10 for the Pedestrian Safety Initiative. The Transportation Trust Fund, the main source of highway user revenues has been hit by the economic downturn. New car sales, registering vehicles and gas tax revenues are all down. The formula for the Trust Fund is based on people driving – a lot. It is an antiquated formula. The legislature passed a law requiring cars to be much more fuel efficient; the goal is to reduce the use of cars and gasoline, so the Trust Fund will likely be reduced further.

Greg Knoop said we may be asking traffic engineers to solve problems that are society wide. We are a highly scheduled society, with pressures on time. People rely on their phones or palmtops because someone is asking a question or demanding their attention. We should recognize that if something looks like a highway, it will be used as a highway. Therefore the design issues are very different. The accident described on Old Georgetown Road probably happened because someone made the turn onto Old Georgetown from the faster traffic on East West Highway, with fewer front doors and less pedestrian activity. In general, it is a car-empowered environment; on the Old Georgetown side you encounter more pedestrians, slower traffic and a people-empowered environment. We should design according to the level

of need to fulfill the people-empowered environment. Where you see a hundred people and just a few cars, for example, the people dominate the area rather than the vehicles and it is safer. We should recognize not only the statistics of highway use when designing a pedestrian environment, but focus on the characteristics of the urban center as well.

Mr. Schwarzbart thanked Delegate Bronrott for attending the meeting and providing valuable information on pedestrian safety issues.

Item 4 – Updates: Ms. Brecher announced that the County was faced with closing a nearly \$600 million budget gap. Mr. Leggett's budget as submitted to the Council had proposed cutting some Ride On service in an effort to avoid raising taxes and fees. The budget ultimately avoided most cuts to Ride On. Other budget items of note:

- Council voted to increase the subsidies for low income seniors and low income disabled residents to participate in the *Call 'N Ride* program, the taxi voucher program.
- Funding was maintained at the FY09 level for the Friendship Heights Super Fare Share program (\$127,000).
- Reduced the amount of funding available to reset traffic signals county wide to the new 3.5 ft per second crossing standard. This will take one additional year to complete – expected completion date FY13.
- Pedestrian Safety Campaign had some funding restored that the County Executive had proposed be cut. This was not because the Executive did not recognize the priority, but was faced with a large budget gap.
- Funding for the Hiker-Biker Trail was partly restored, which had been cut in the Executive's budget.
- Fifty-thousand dollars was approved for a cell phone parking payment pilot in downtown Bethesda.
- Council approved \$500,000 for a bus rapid transit study. **Councilmember Marc Elrich** has proposed a county wide network of BRT lines.
- There is funding for a parking management study that will be done as part of a joint study between DOT and Park and Planning.
- The budget retains Ride On's *Seniors Ride Free* and *Kids Ride Free* programs.
- The County will retain the C-pass, the free Ride On pass available to all county employees.
- Parking fees will be raised in Bethesda, and in North Bethesda; Council staff has recommended looking at raising parking fees in other areas.
- North County Depot construction has been deferred by one additional year. This is the new Ride On facility in the Clarksburg area, which has also been downsized from a capacity of 250 buses to 120. The county will not have use of the facility until about four years hence.
- Expedited Bill 17-09, sponsored by **Councilmember Nancy Floreen**, is under consideration by Council. The bill would enable transit service that serves a parking lot district (PLD) to receive funding from that PLD. PLD funds will be used to fund transit if it directly serves that area. [**Mr. Hartman** added that in his understanding the bill will allow funds from any PLD to be used for transit that serves any other PLD.]
- Councilmember George Leventhal has introduced two bills as part of a cost saving measure that would eliminate a number of advisory committees, similar to the Friendship Heights TMD AC. The Friendship Heights group has not been selected for elimination. However, it is of concern that the Silver Spring TMD Advisory Committee has been selected. **Mr. McCloskey** requested that the Leventhal bills and any related information be forwarded to the committee members.

Item 6 – Other Business:

Meeting adjourned at 10:10 AM

Next meeting date: June 10, 2009

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